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**BRIDE PRICE AND GENDER VIOLENCE FEMALE GENITAL
MUTILATION IN UGANDA**

By Jane Frances Kuka

**Former Minister of State Of State, Disaster Preparedness & Refuges, Office of the Prime
Ministries and Women MP, Kapchorwa –Uganda 1996 to 2002**

Definition of Gender Violence

According to the declaration on elimination of violence against women, gender violence is the physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering of women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.

In Africa, the list for the various forms of gender- based violence is not exhaustive. The international community, governments and development actors including activists have recognised a few of these including female genital mutilation.

However, it should be noted that in most FGM practicing communities, FGM and bride price go side by side and are both interchangeable and reinforcing. Bride price in itself is another form of gender based violence and discrimination.

FGM

Female Genital Mutilation also called female genital Cutting (FGC) or female circumcision in some communities is a traditional practice, which involves the cutting off, or alteration of the female external genitalia for social culture reasons rather than medical reasons. The practice is regarded as a sacred ritual sanctioned by ancestors, protected by cultural beliefs and used to initiate girls into perceived womanhood among some communities who mutilate at adolescent age. The practice is performed in 28 countries in Africa with some countries like Egypt, Sudan and Eritrea having over 90% prevalence.

In Uganda, FGM is practiced by the Sabinu tribe of Kapchorwa and the Pokots of Nakapirpirit District. The practice has also been reported among migrant Kalengins, Somalis and Nubian communities scattered in many districts namely Busia, Tororo, Soroti, Luwero and Masindi.

Among the Sabinus and Pokots, the practice is done every even year in the month of December and involves cutting the clitoris and labia minora of women/ girls who fall within 15-30 + years of age. But the modal age group is 18-24 years. The practices are used as rites of passage from childhood into womanhood.

The practise is associated with several health, economic and psycho-social problems that impact negatively on the lives of adolescents. Apart from dropping out of school early and marrying soon after the circumcision ritual, females who undergo genital cutting are predisposed to a number of health risks ranging from severe bleeding and pain, infections including HIV/AIDS, lameness, painful and unpleasant sexual intercourse, shock resulting in some cases into death, obstructed labour and its related problems to low sexual desire and pleasure (Metcalf, 1996, Kakuba & Kanesathan 1995). For those who have undertaken the knife but scream during the operation, they are regarded them as cowards and are socially harassed, discriminated and denied any responsible role in society. It brings embarrassment to the whole family. The women who resist FGC are taken as deviants to the culture. These are major violations of human rights of women.

Bride Price

Bride price among the circumcising communities, particularly the Sabiny and Pokots is a strong element of their traditions. The practice is almost universal to everybody whether educated or not, rich or poor. Among the Sabiny, it ranges from five to twelve heads of cattle and goats, hens and other accompanying items like clothes, utensils and money. For the Pokots, it can go up to 60 heads of cattle depending on the wealth of the groom's family. In either community, even the poor are forced to pay at least something for their wives. Bride Price is a means of owing the wife married and for the wife, an assurance of the marriage. On termination of the marriage, there is refund of the bride price paid less the number of children produced to that husband. To some families especially poor ones, parents coerce their children to marry for the sake of bride price. Cases arise where children are married off at the age of 13 years for bride price. In a number of cases, girls are forced by their parents and brothers because of failure to pay bride price and thereafter married off to another husband who can pay no matter the age difference between the bride and groom.

FGM and Bride Price

Among the Sabiny and Pokots, FGM is used as a means of graduating a girl from childhood into womanhood. Immediately after circumcision, the girl is married off no matter the age. Circumcised girls/women who stay at home for an additional one or two more circumcision seasons without getting married find it difficult to get a husband as men rush in for the new younger girls who have graduated after circumcision. Girls are hardly allowed to get married before undertaking FGM within the Pokot community.

It is based on the above premise that parents who want bride price will coerce their daughters into FGM so as to get married off easily. The bride price is withheld until the wife undertakes FGM. So women who are married before getting circumcised are forced to go back to their parents for circumcision.

The parents of the bride will hold her at ransom on coming for circumcision until the husband pays bride price.

- Circumcised girl attracts bride price.

INTERVENTIONS

- Initiation of interventions and how it backfired – 1991. This was because I Mrs. Kuka and Dr. Elizabeth Madra had attended a conference in Addis Ababa on harmful practices and then had started sensitisation seminars on FGM when the Sabiny Elders felt that it was disrespect for their culture and values.

It was in view of these health and human rights considerations that Uganda Government, development partners and women activists have initiated culturally sensitive to address the practise. Intervention programmes like REACH and FPAU, GOD Parents Association-Uganda have initiated some efforts which has resulted in changing the practice from being a taboo even to talk about it to now being a public domain in these districts.

- More community focused interventions starting 1996 using advocacy with Sabiny Elders, NGOs, President of the Republic of Uganda who is Patron of FGM and I Mrs. Kuka as National Coordinator/Vice Patron for Community that Cares Uganda. These interventions were aimed at eradicating this cultural practice that had become harmful and was really stigmatising to the victims.

LIMITATIONS

The campaign against FGC/M has been hindered by various limitations, which include among others:

- Poor networking and collaboration among the implementing partners.

- Limited knowledge on existing skills, experience and successful stories, which can be replicated to help in the campaign to eradicate FGM
- Inadequate financial resources committed to FGM activities.
- Inadequate financial resource data on FGM and lack of operational data including management information system -to operational research data on FGM.

Weak institutional and human capacities to properly design, implement, monitor and evaluate FGM intervention – capacity building & educating trainers in the fight to ensure FGM becomes voluntary.

It is however crucial to note that the above interventions have led limitations in taking impact to its full expectation. This is due to the approaches used, which didn't maximise the communities role in shaping their own destiny. Communities have to be helped to understand the magnitude of their own solutions. FGM has several effects which impact directly on the lives of the families and communities circumcising. An approach that helps them to realise this properly and tasking them to come up with solutions would definitely work in addressing FGM.

Community That Care-Uganda (COTHACU) is a grassroots based NGO that has her membership and volunteers established at the local villages. Its decisions are made at lower levels and built upwards. The FGM project of COTHACU will benefit from this established network. COTHACU by nature of its establishment operates on the philosophy of supporting communities to appreciate the problem of FGM in their community and allowing them to come up with locally based interventions which are sustainable and well understood by them. External interventions will be used only in the initial stages.

WAY FORWARD

- Educate the Girls Child and develop income-generating activities for the disadvantaged groups and support for those who have said no to FGM.
- Further finding for those Girls already at school, as they are key to the campaign against FGM.
- Set up Technical Institutions to train both girls and boys in life skills activities
- Create social services to cater for community needs.